

Marijuana, security flap blotting nominee's record

By Bill Gertz
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Richard Burt

A film canister containing marijuana was discovered three years ago at the residence of U.S. Ambassador to West Germany Richard Burt, but security agents didn't report the finding at the time, according to a State Department inspector general's report.

The report also indicated that Mr. Burt, nominated to be the Bush administration's top strategic arms negotiator, misled the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during confirmation hearings last month, when he denied a 1983 security violation involving top-secret documents.

Mr. Burt told the Senate panel he had received one minor security violation citation. The report detailed three breaches.

Mr. Burt didn't respond to repeated efforts to reach him for comment.

The report, parts of which are unclassified, was requested by Sen. Jesse Helms, North Carolina Republican, a longtime Burt critic. The allegation of marijuana possession came from "an informant to another law enforcement agency," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

He said the report was "a strong and categorical statement" clearing Mr. Burt of any impropriety following allegations that security breaches had been covered up.

"The report found that the three background investigations by the department of Mr. Burt in 1981, 1985 and 1989 were conducted in full compliance with the applicable executive order and department policies and procedures," Mr. Boucher said.

Mr. Boucher said the inspector general's probe found no evidence Mr. Burt "possessed or used marijuana."

The report said U.S. security agents found the marijuana in a 35mm film cartridge inside Mr. Burt's desk in the ambassador's official residence in Bonn.

Mr. Boucher said the drug was "not in his [Mr. Burt's] possession. It was in someone else's possession." He said he didn't have specifics.

The inspector general's office said it found no evidence "pointing toward Mr. Burt's use of this or any or any other controlled substance while in the employ of the State Department."

But the report noted that the initial investigation into the discovery of the canister in Mr. Burt's desk, during a sweep for electronic listening devices in January 1986, was conducted "in a manner inconsistent with professional investigative methodology. For example, it appears that no records were originated or retained."

"The results of the investigation, for reasons unknown, but in no way attributable to Mr. Burt, appear not to have been communicated to senior management either on an information basis or for decision," the report stated.

The report also said Mr. Burt didn't initially notify the State Department that he had nothing to do with the drug. A later security report on the incident was "lost" and never placed in Mr. Burt's security file.

According to the report, Mr. Burt told the inspector general the drug was left behind by a guest at a December 1985 party.

The IG report is expected to complicate Mr. Burt's nomination to be START negotiator. During his 1983 confirmation hearing to be assistant secretary of state for European affairs, 11 conservative senators said he "showed such disrespect for highly classified secrets ... that he should be disqualified for the State Department post."

At his confirmation hearing May 5, Mr. Burt was asked by Mr. Helms if he had ever been cited for security violations and he replied "I think I got a pink slip" for leaving "limited official-use" papers on a desk.

Mr. Helms then asked Mr. Burt if "there wasn't anything involving a briefcase?" to which Mr. Burt replied: "Not that I'm aware of."

In a "clarification" to his May 5 testimony sent to the Senate this week, Mr. Burt stated that he reviewed his security file after the hearing and discovered additional violations.

The IG report stated that in 1983 an embassy security officer in Brussels in recovered a briefcase with top-secret arms control documents from an NBC reporter, took it to Mr. Burt in Rome and "concluded from his [Mr. Burt's] information that the contents probably had not been compromised."

The security officer then issued Mr. Burt a "security violation," the report stated.

The IG report lists three security violations by Mr. Burt in 1983 and 1986, involving confidential, secret and top-secret documents.

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